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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews research and evaluation results which indicate the effectiveness of Head Start. Research concerning the effects of Head Start on the academic achievement and cognitive and social functioning of children is summarized briefly, and research on the impact of medical, dental, and nutritional services made available by Head Start is also reviewed. Suggestions on how parents and staff of Head Start can collect their own data and create a research base to justify their program are listed. (CM)

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HEAD START: IT'S NICE, BUT DOES IT WORK?

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From 1972 to 1977, I was the Director of a 650 child Head Start program in a suburban New York county. Although this program had full and part day centers in 15 poverty areas in this county of close to one and one half million persons and received close to $2,000,000 in funds each year from various Federal, State and local sources, I was always surprised to find how non-visible the program was. When I would talk to the average citizen about Head Start, I would usually find them saying something like this:

"Oh, Head Start? Wasn't that phased out with OEO a few years ago?"

"Head Start - that's the program that didn't work."

Some of the more knowledgeable ones would cite the Westinghouse Report as evidence of the lack of worth of this program.

"Oh, yes, Head Start - we have a program like that at our college." They would usually be referring to some program for disadvantaged youth trying to make it through college.

These comments would bother me because, as you and I at least know, OEO did get phased out but Head Start didn't. The Westinghouse Report* was full of inaccuracies (as I'll demonstrate later) and certainly not a measure of Head Start's worth. And, although Head Start shares some similarities with other programs for disadvantaged children, it certainly doesn't deal with them at the college level.

*The Westinghouse Report nearly was responsible for the program's demise. It raised enough question in President's Nixon's mind to have it categorized as an experimental rather than an operational program.

It occurred to me then and still does, that Head Start is badly in need of some research which presents evidence of its worth in addition to some public relations that lets the public know what this valuable program is giving them for their money. This need seems particularly acute as Head Start celebrates its 13th birthday with a budget approaching $700,000,000.

Head Start has been remarkably successful in avoiding its various foes as other anti-poverty programs have been phased out or subsumed under other government agencies, thereby lessening their effectiveness. But, the fact remains that Head Start is still project Head Start, a program with a fixed beginning and ending point and subject to congressional or administrative phase-out if it is not considered effective. A firm foundation of research and evaluation results showing the worth and effectiveness of Head Start would be an important asset to make Head Start a permanent governmental entity working to benefit the poor and their children.

What about that early research?

Early in the program's history the so-called Westinghouse study was published. This OEO funded study conducted by Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio University in 1969[1] claimed that Head Start gains were lost after a few years. Westinghouse researchers and others[2] found, for example, that Head Start children gained 5 - 10 I.Q. points and 20 - 25 points on school readiness tests as a result of their participation in Head Start. However, when they were tested at a later time their scores equaled or fell below those of their non-Head Start peers. Even in spite of those conclusions, researchers were quick to point out they were having difficulty finding appropriate tests to measure the effects of this complex new program on children and used the testing devices already available. They also complained about the possible misuse of

their assessments to condemn a program that needed a lot more time in order to be validly assessed.

Let me quote someone who puts the Westinghouse Report and similar efforts to rest. Dr. Donald T. Campbell, President of the American Psychological Association says this:

> "Head Start was a disastrous example of good intentions and bad methodology producing worthless evaluations. We now have an overwhelming, statistically impressive stack of computer output on the results of Head Start. This mass of data snows the ordinary program administrator or the ordinary citizen, but the fact is that the flaws in those statistical analyses were so gross that the whole thing is useless. It turned out, by unfortunate accident, that at least six biases have been built into most compensatory-education programs, all having the effect of making a worthless program look harmful and a beneficial program look worthless."[3]

Dr. Campbell backs this statement up with a long and complicated analysis of the inferior research methods used to produce the faulty data upon which early conclusions about the worth of Head Start were made.

<u>What valid research is available concerning the effect of Head Start on children?"</u>

In spite of Dr. Campbell's criticism of research on children in Head Start, there have been some studies of worth. Let me cite a few:

In 1970, Marshall Smith and Joan Bissell undertook, with funds from the Carnegie and Ford Corporations, a reanalysis of Head Start using the same data obtained through the Westinghouse Study. They found different results.

They concluded, for example, that first grade children who participated in Head Start performed significantly better than their control group counterparts on the Metropolitan Readiness test. This test is an important and accepted measure of a child's ability to perform academically in the early grades. This finding was particularly true of Head Start children enrolled in full year, urban, black centers.

Similarly, these same children performed better than their control counterparts in the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities. The latter is a test of children's language, perception, and short-term memory skills.

In a recent Summary Report of Head Start National Evaluations published by the (now defunct) Office of Child Development[4], the question was raised, "Did Children Gain from their Head Start Experience? Their answer to this question is, "Yes - in many areas." Head Start programs share common child and family goals but the means by which programs achieve these goals vary widely from one section of the country to another. Some simply do Head Start better than others. As a result, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. In this report involving large samples of Head Start children, they found that Head Start children were found to improve substantially in cognitive and social functioning and in such areas as motivation for achievement, school readiness and academic achievement (as measured by pre-school inventory tests.)

In the general field of compensatory education, Head Start is considered an "intervention program." Throught special, usually governmental efforts, architects of compensatory education hoped to improve the lives of children where conventional means might not. So, at about the same time that Head Start was originated a number of other intervention projects were initiated towards the same types of Head Start goals but with a more specific emphasis on enhancing the cognitive

abilities of children. Recent follow-up studies of those "Head Start like" programs are encouraging.

Dr. Francis Palmer[5], following up on seven early intervention studies conducted in the mid-nineteen sixties found that children in these early programs were significantly less likely to be left back in school. Said another way, they were more likely to advance from one grade to the next with their peers.

In an analysis of five of those intervention programs, it was found that children in these programs were significantly less likely than control group children to be assigned to special education programs in their public schools.

Although not universely true across all studies, Palmer finds that in certain individual studies, experimental children are scoring higher in reading (especially girls), math and on occasion, I.Q.

Again, these conclusions are drawn from studies on Head Start like programs and suggest possible conclusions to be drawn about Head Start as an intervention. Certainly, it would be important to examine the effects of Head Start in terms of keeping Head Start graduates in their appropriate grade and out of special classes.

Does Head Start work for children in terms of variables important to educators? Apparently, many feel that it does and those studies support this conclusion.

Does Head Start work within the area of health? Dr. Edward Zigler of Yale, formerly director of the Office of Child Development and an authority on Head Start asks us to remember a basic factor of child development. In order to achieve the goal of social competance - that is, to master appropriate formal concepts, perform well in school, stay out of trouble with the law, and relate well to adults, a child must first be physically well. He says, "A child who is ill or hungry

cannot learn from or enjoy his experiences and relationships with those around him."[6]

His initial answer to this question of whether or not Head Start works in the area of health is, of course, it does. In 1973, he reports that 1/3 of the Head Start children were found to suffer from some form of illness or physical handicap. Of these children, 75 percent were receiving treatment for those health problems.

Dr. Gertrude Hunter reported in 1971[7] that of all the children enrolled in summer or full year programs, 83% had received a physical examination by a physician.

In addition to this, she found through sampling of full year and summer Head Start children during the years 1960 - 1968 that:

Over 50% of the children received a tuberculin skin test while in the program.

52% of full year children and 55% of summer children received a blood test for the detection of anemia.

49 and 64% (respectively) of full and summer children were screened for hearing and even higher percentages were reported for vision testing.

Similar percentages were also reported for children receiving urine tests.

Although Dr. Hunter doesn't report upon comparison or control group children who did not receive this type of testing, it's safe to infer that Head Start was a significant factor in bringing about a situation where physical examinations and health testing of children could be made. Critics of America's health delivery system for the poor would be quick to support the contention that pre-school children not attending Head Start would not likely to have had this type of systematic health care.

Definitive studies of the effects of Head Start on children's

health and nutritional status are few. It was for this reason that HEW's Office of Human Development Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) recently funded a 4 year contract to ABT Associates to assess the impact of medical, dental, and nutritional services on Head Start children. I'm grateful to Ellen Glovsky of ABT who found the few studies in this area which I'll quickly summarize for you.

In the Fall of 1971, a group of nutritionists[8], studied the nutritional status of Head Start children in a Maine program and compared their status with children from middle to upper income children attending a university nursery school. They focused primarily on the food intakes of both groups of children and their mothers. They found at the start of the program that Head Start children and nursery school children were similar in terms of their intakes in terms of calories, protein, fat, carbohydrates, etc. Head Start children consumed significantly less calcium and ascorbic acid. These are important in young children for the growth of teeth and bones and for promotion of healing.

They also found that nursery school children were more likely to receive vitamin and mineral supplements as part of their daily food intake. After the study was concluded, researchers determined that the Head Start program had a positive effect on the nutrient and energy intake of those children in regular attendance. Their consumption of such U.S.D.A. supplied foods as milk, cheese, vegetables, citrus fruits and tomatoes led to increased calcium, Vitamin A, ascorbic acid intakes in a significant way. An interesting sidelight was the finding that although their children's nutritional intake was improved, mothers were not. Head Start mothers were significantly lower than their middle class counterparts in their intakes of energy, calcium, iron, Vitamin A, ascorbic acid, riboflavin and thiamin.

In another small study in the same area of Maine[9], researchers

compared Head Start and University nursery school children and found that iron deficiency (a sign of anemia) was much higher among Head Start children in the Fall. After a year of Head Start, the researchers concluded that the iron status of Head Start children measured through their hemoglobin and hematocrit levels had significantly improved. The nursery school children's iron status was adequate and remained so from the beginning to the end of their program. The research concluded that the Head Start children's improvement resulted from food consumed at Head Start and from more adequate consumption at home due to better nutritional instruction of parents.

As I mentioned earlier, these are but a few isolated studies of the worth of Head Start in the area of health. But few as they are, they indicate that Head Start can be a significant factor in the improvement of pre-school children's health and nutritional status.

What can you do to create a basis of research to justify your program?

In earlier pages, I've cited some studies that parents and staff of Head Start can use in their debates with critics of this program.

You can be extremely effective in an argument with child care opponents if you can quote hard research data which substantiates the worth of your program.

Although the studies I've cited were conducted by trained researchers from university settings, one needn't depend entirely on results from these studies to justify your program. You can create your own research base. You can look for quantifiable outcomes of your program to show how children and families have gained from the intervention of Head Start in their lives.

You can collect your own data.

This type of enterprise is called "action research" by researchers and is looked upon as a legitable form of inquiry although

not terribly scientific.

1. Find out what percentage of your Head Start graduates go on to a regular kindergarden as compared to a transitional or special class? Where are your kids after they reach 1st grade, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, etc? It would be easy enough to track your Head Start graduates due to the close knit characteristics of Head Start. Some of this information can be gotten from parents or from cooperative school officials. The basic question to be answered: Are Head Start kids keeping up with their non-Head Start peers in terms of their movement through the public school grades or are they being shunted off into special or transitional classes?
   How are your Head Start graduates doing in their school work? Again, a close cooperative working relationship with school officials may give you (with parent's permission, of course) achievement scores of your kids. How are they doing in terms of local or national achievement norms in math, reading, etc.
2. How effective are you being now (or after kids graduate) in other areas? When I was a Head Start Director, an article appeared saying that a county study of children in day and nursery schools, showed that only 30% had received their full range of immunizations against childhood diseases - measles, mumps, rubella, polio, etc. We quickly did an assessment of the children in our program and found that 93% had completed the necessary series of innoculations. We wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Health telling her of our findings and shortly afterwards were rewarded with a congratulatory letter and short newspaper article telling the public how Head Start is working successfully to prevent disease among low-income children.

   A program could do a number of short studies showing how, for

example, Head Start's intervention was responsible for having x number of families see a doctor or dentist for the first time or how Head Start worked to train parents to more effectively use public assistance monies to purchase a greater amount of food than before, etc.

3. How effective have you been in training your parents to be advocates of continued quality education in the public schools?
One measure of this is the number of ex-Head Start parents you can find sitting on various boards and committees. How many parents can you find on the School District's handicapped advisory committee mandated by recent legislation? How many are members of elected P.T.A. committees; the Title I committee; the School Board itself; local Social Services committees, elective offices, etc.

4. How many people has Head Start taken off welfare? Head Start often hires former welfare recipients, thereby, making them tax producing consumers. In other cases, public assistance grants are decreased because the family now has an income.
How much has this saved the taxpayer in welfare costs not now being expended? It would be easy enough to calculate the welfare dollars saved because Head Start has intervened to take parents and staff off welfare or at least reduce their level of dependence.

5. What have you done about documenting your successes?
I remember one Head Start family we dealt with. As a result of the child's contact with Head Start, their entire status improved. We worked with all family members to bring them into the health care system. Through effective advocacy, their income status - a combination of public assistance and jobs-was improved. They received educational guidance and even got training in more effective buying habits. They were our success - from child through grandparent.

Such successes should be written up by one of your more talented staff or parent writers. These stories make good newspaper copy and can be great morale boosters for staff who work so hard on families behalf.

This paper has talked about ways one can demonstrate to the public, to public school educators, to politicians and to skeptics - how Head Start has worked and why, perhaps, it should be continued and even expanded. I've found that the best disseminators of this type of information are a trained cadre of parents and staff. Equip them with some of the information I've provided and arm them with information from studies you've done yourself and you have a potent public relations force that will insure Head Start's existence for years to come.

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